

Combat Hearing Readiness

By Dr. John Akinyemi

Personal protective equipment (PPE) normally is considered only for Marines in the shop. Marines in the field, training and patrolling operationally, also are encountering damaging noise that can result in temporary and even permanent hearing loss. Noise levels from explosions and gunfire can reduce combat hearing readiness in a firefight. The hearing loss will result in a reduction of situational awareness and ability to communicate effectively.

Marines can maximize their combat hearing readiness by wearing appropriate hearing protection in combat and training. Combat arms earplugs (CAE) are modern hearing protective devices developed especially for military personnel. The CAE will protect against steady-state noise (e.g., noise in and around aircraft, noisy vehicles, engine-running watercraft, etc.) and impact noise (e.g., gunfire). When you wear CAE to protect against impact noise, you can carry on normal conversations and maintain hearing readiness.

To wear the Combat Arms (Non-Linear) Earplug for protection against impact noise:

- 1) Hold the olive drab side of the earplug in the right hand.
- 2) Reach across the head with the left hand, gently grab the top of the right ear and pull up and out. This straightens out the ear canal for easier insertion.
- 3) Insert the yellow side of the earplug into the canal with a slight twisting motion.
- 4) Repeat steps 1-3 to insert earplug in the other ear.
- 5) You can tell if the earplugs are inserted correctly if your voice sounds like it is in your head, similar to the effect of having a head cold, and when you tug lightly on the earplug, there is some resistance.
- 6) When removing the earplug, slowly rotate it (breaks the seal) counter-clockwise before pulling out of the ear canal.

To wear CAE for protecting against steady-state noise (e.g., in and around aircraft, noisy vehicles and watercraft, etc.), carry out the preceding steps, holding the yellow side of the earplug in the right hand, but inserting olive drab side in the ear.

Other care instructions for CAE:

- Keep filter holes free of earwax and other debris.
- Check proper insertion for slight tension by gently tugging on the plugs.
- When possible, clean plugs with soap and water, then dry, and return to case.

CAEs are available in the stock system—National Stock Number (NSN) 6515-01-486-2710. They do not replace the need for other types of specialized communication systems or hearing-protection devices, such as those used in aviation operations. **GW**

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